

**ARTIKEL**  
**HIBAH BERSAING**



**Pengembangan Model Komunitas Pembelajar Profesional Sebagai Strategi  
Peningkatan Mutu Guru Berbasis Sekolah**

**Tahun ke I dari Rencana 2 Tahun**

Oleh

Dwi Esti Andriani, M.Pd, M.EdSt (0010057701)

Dr. Wiwik Wijayanti (0023017103)

Pujaningsih, M.Pd (0006128112)

Dibiayai oleh DIPA Universitas Negeri Yogyakarta dengan Surat Perjanjian Penugasan Dalam Rangka  
Pelaksanaan Program Penelitian Hibah Bersaing Tahun Anggaran 2013  
Nomor: 034/APHB-BOPTN/UN34.21/2013 tanggal 27 Mei 2013

**UNIVERSITAS NEGERI YOGYAKARTA**  
**NOVEMBER 2013**

# Principal's Role in Developing Professional Learning Community at Public Elementary Schools in Indonesia

*Dwi Esti Andriani, Wirwik Wijayanti, Pujaningsih*

e- mail : [esti\\_apfipuny@yahoo.com](mailto:esti_apfipuny@yahoo.com)

## *Abstract*

*Developing professional learning community (PCL) has been regarded as one of effective strategies for schools to improve teacher quality and ultimately, the quality of student learning. It is because when becoming PCL, a school is a conducive place for teachers to learn from each others continuously aimed at improving student learning in classroom. Teachers feel free to discuss their teaching problems, to share their success and new experiences, to tell different ideas and so knowledge, skills, and valuable teachers' experiences are widely spread among teachers. To develop PLC at elementary schools in Indonesia, principal plays an important role. It is because at elementary schools, sharing knowledge and skills to some extent still faces organizational barriers such as insufficient or little money to support PLC, low motivation to learn among teachers, and unsupportive cultures. In such situation, it is a demand that principal creates supporting conditions to facilitate teacher collaborative learnings.*

*Key words: Principal, Professional Learning Community*

## **Introduction**

Teaching is not easy. It is not merely about planning and delivering lessons to students. Rather, it is a high artistic skill of applying the most appropriate teaching strategies to a certain classroom context. It requires teachers to be able to link their comprehension about students characteristics, pedagogy, and curriculum in their teaching design and practice. Accordingly, teachers need to continuously evaluate and do reflection of their practices, update their knowledge about a wide range of teaching methods, and understand students characteristics, in a continual learning.

To facilitate continuous teacher learnings, either individually and collaborately, schools need to be professional learning communities. When a school is learning communities, there is close relationship among school members (the principal, teachers, students, supporting staff) based on shared values, and shared responsibility of the quality of student learnings. They frequently share knowledge, skills, and experiences aimed at improving student learning. PLC is one of key factors of effective schools (Bolam, et all, 2005, Fulton & Britton, 2011). Therefore,

this community can enhance teachers' professional practices and efficacy and finally better students' learning and achievement (Alberta, 2006, NCTE, 2010)

However, despite the considerable benefits of professional learning communities, developing professional learning communities at public elementary schools in Indonesia, might deal with some organizational constraints. It is found that homeroom teachers particularly the elders are low in motivation to learn either in team or individually. Besides, the schools usually lack of resources, especially money, to support community activities (Andriani, Wijayanti, & Pujaningsih, 2013).

In such situation, the role of principals to create, develop, and sustain professional learning communities is crucial. This essay supports the previous findings that principals play vital roles in developing professional learning communities at schools (Bolam, et al., 2005; Lunenbergh, 2010; Thomson, Gregg, & Niska, 2004). It is also consistent with a view that regardless common characteristics and processes, the development of professional learning communities is much influenced by school conditions, for instance size and location (Bolam, et al., 2005)

### **Features of Public Elementary Schools in Indonesia**

Public elementary schools are schools that are established and mainly funded by government. Consequently, the school operation and its programs are much influenced by government policies. One of the policies has been implementing is allocating educational financial aids (*Bantuan Operasional Sekolah*) for all public elementary and junior high schools to provide free education. The aids is distributed to schools annually based on unit cost of each student in a year. It means that the more students school have, the more money schools get. In addition, since government already give money to schools to operate, schools are not allowed to collect money from student parents.

At public elementary schools, particularly the high performing ones, this policy significantly influence their school improvement efforts. Compared to the low performing ones, these schools usually have extra educational programs to meet students needs and provide better learning quality, for example is school based professional development or remedial programs. To run the programs, schools usually get financial supports from student parents and stakeholders. At present, due to the goverment policy that bans schools to get money from student parents, such programs stop running.

In terms of school size, most public elementary schools are small schools. It means that the number of students in every grade in every classroom is less than 19 with the number of total students is less than 150 students. Accordingly, usually there are only about 10 professional staff at schools. They are 6 homeroom teachers, one of them is the principal, who teach students grade 1 to 6, 1 sport education teacher, 1 religion teacher, and 1 supporting staff. In regards with school facilities, in general schools meet the minimum facility standard set up by government. However, in rural or isolated regions, the conditions of public small elementary schools could be much worse.

Another common feature is close relationship and frequent personal interaction among school members. The small school building and its arrangement considerably influence this situation. The schools usually only have one teacher room where teachers seats are arranged in a certain pattern so that teachers easily talk or to do some works together. This is in line with Stoll, et al, (2006) who argue that small schools have been found to be more engaging work environments for both adults and students. In addition, findings show that physical proximity facilitated by near seats support collective learnings among teachers (Andriani, Wiwik & Pujaningsih, 2013)

### **Defining Professional Learning Communities**

A professional learning community at a school can be defined as a group of professionals (the principal, teachers, and supporting staff) who are committed to improve the quality of student learning through a collaborative learning. This community is bounded by shared and common values, views, belief, expectations, and goals. This definition can be understood from the meaning of the constituent words.

Sergiovanni (2006) defines communities as "collections of people who come together because they share common commitments, ideas, and values... Therefore, sense of 'we' is stronger than 'I'" (p. 103). At a school, a community might be a group of students, teachers, supporting staff, principals or a combination of them. Meanwhile, a learning community is a group of people who share common goals and create a conducive learning environment to enhance their learning opportunities to develop their potentials (Kilpatric, without year). Professionals itself means a person with an expertise. His expertise is merely gained from trainings but also from his working experiences within his expertise area (Dufour & Eaker in Thomson, Greg, & Niska, 2004).

## School as Professional Learning Communities

The essence of professional learning communities is collaborative learnings aimed at improving the quality of student learning (Thomson, Greg, Nisca: 2004). When the community is a group of teachers, they “continually inquire into their practice and, as a result, discover, create, and negotiate new meanings that improve their teaching practice.” (NCTE, 2010).

If a school has become a professional learning community, a school is a conducive place to learn for its professional staff, both individually and collaboratively. Teachers talk and discuss their teaching failures to their colleagues without feeling embarrassed. Besides, they are also used to sharing their achievement, new experiences, knowledge, and skills without feeling afraid that by doing so, they will be judged to be arrogant by their colleagues (Department of Education and Training, 2000). In addition, dissent is acceptable. Not only discussion, but also debate is commonly found in daily conversation. This is because habits or tradition are subject to be questioned, evaluated or critized in order to have better practices (Oxley, 2001). Supporting this condition is their collegiality which is based on mutual trust, respect, support (Bolam, 2008).

Collaborative learning among teachers might occur formally and informally. In formal forms, collaborative learnings is organized as one of routine school programs with financial supports from school budget. Take one example is *Musyawarah Guru Mata Pelajaran (MGMP)* – *Subject Teacher Discussion Group* in Junior and Senior High School in Indonesia. This group consists of subject teachers in a certain area, for instance Science or Math. They conduct discussion activity on a regular basis to share their understanding of their practices in classroom to improve their student learning.

In informal forms, collaborative learnings occur when two or more teachers have professional conversations aimed at improving their teaching practices. For instance is a young teacher who is asking about effective classroom management to an experienced teacher during his spare time. Another example is when a teacher is telling his colleagues about new teaching strategies learned from a training program in which he participated. When such conversation frequently take place, a school is a professional learning community. “The very nature of a learning community is where collaboration and sharing is the norm. It means that much professional learning occurs informally, and may not always be team-based or delivered at the school” (Department of Education and Training, 2005, p. 11)

## **Dimensions of Professional Learning Communities**

There have been a wide range of views on what dimensions or characteristics of professional learning community proposed by scholars, for instance Adottir (2005), Bolam, et al (2005), DuFour and Eaker in Benson (2011), Chrowther (2009), Fulton and Briston (2011). Regardless the differences, the five dimensions proposed by Morrissey (2000) below are generally agreed.

### *1. Shared leadership*

In a professional learning community, shared leadership means that principals provide opportunities for teachers to take a wide range of leadership roles and develop supportive organizational conditions -structure and culture – for professional staff to develop their capacities. Applying this leadership, principals work together with their staff to achieve agreed goals without dominating.

### *2. Shared vision and values*

Shared vision is a common ideal image in the future that together, school members want to achieve. In professional learning activities, shared vision guides the focus, goals, and performance standards of professional learning community activities that is intended to improve professional practices and lead to student learning improvement. Shared values are the basis of attitudes and behaviours. In professional learning communities, values include collegiality, collaboration, mutual support, trust, and respect.

### *3. Collaborative learning among professionals*

Collaborative learning among professionals means that the principal, teachers, and supporting staff or the combination of them collectively seek solution to problems in classroom or schools or find better educational practices to improve student learnings. They are engaged in commitment to improvement efforts. They work as a team and share responsibility to ensure high student achievement.

### *4. Supportive conditions*

Supportive conditions are essential to create, develop as well as to sustain collaborative learnings activities. Hord in Morrissey (2002) argue that there are at least two necessary conditions required for establishing and sustaining professional learning communities. They are structural conditions and collegiality. Structural conditions include time allocation, communication procedures, school size, teachers proximity, and staff professional development

while collegiality include positive attitudes, common goals or vision, norms of continuous inquiry and improvement, respect, trust, and positive, and caring relationship.

#### *5. Shared personnel practice*

Shared personnel practice means that teachers allow others know their teaching practices in classroom and take lessons of it. This activity takes a wide range of interactions such as collegial coaching, classroom observation, and lesson study in which teachers collectively study teaching practices done by their colleagues.

### **Principal 's Role in Developing PLC at Elementary School**

Research shows that most of elementary schools, particularly the low performing ones, in Yogyakarta, Indonesia have not become professional learning communities yet. Teachers are not used to sharing about their practices and knowledge. Furthermore, they do not have a routine homeroom teacher group discussion activities with sufficient supporting resources including money and experts to provide a learning environment for them to collectively learn from each other (Andriani, Wijayanti, & Pujaningsih, 2013).

In such situation, the principals' role is pivotal. According to Benson (2011), they should build at least two conditions for professional learning communities to successfully begin. The first one is a structure that allows time for teachers to meet and talk on regular basis. Accordingly, teaching roles and responsibilities should be organized in a certain pattern that builds interdependencies among teachers. Furthermore, close physical proximity should be intentionally created so that teachers frequently meet and talk each others and so they may naturally collaborate with one another. The second one is building a school culture based on trust and respect, with strong, supportive leaders that focus on openness and improvement (Benson, 2011)

Finding shows that creating professional learning communities at public elementary schools in Indonesia requires principals to establish a routine program of a homeroom teacher discussion group. This program provides a conducive learning environment for homeroom teachers to have professional discussion or talk on a regular basis. (Andriani, Wiwik, & Pujaningsih, 2013). This finding is consistent with Morrissey (2002) and Oxley (2001) who argue that professional learning community development requires principals to provide conditions that facilitate continuous learning of their staff. The need of a routine program of teacher collective learning is more evident if most teachers are low in motivation to learn.

Furthermore, the program should be linked to school mission and vision so that the program can significantly contribute to school effectiveness. Take one example of school vision is achieving students' excellence. When this vision is shared and agreed, teachers know what are important and what should do in their collaborative learnings. As Department of Education and Training (2000) and Andrews & Lewis (2004) argue, principals should have a clear direction on what is expected of each collaborative learning activities. In addition, Lunenburg (2010) argue that setting and communicating school's mission and vision should be the first actions to be done by the principal in an effort to develop professional learning communities.

To gain high commitment of communities toward school mission and vision, principals should engage the communities in the process of school mission and vision development. The principals can do this by discussing about what school will be like in the future with school communities and then make a general agreement about it (Lunenberg, 2010). As a result, the school mission and vision are communities idealism, hopes and expectations that direct and inspire community members in their collaborative learning activities.

Directed toward school vision and mission, the program may have a wide range of topic which is not merely about teaching and learning but also about finding solution of school problems and challenges imposed by government and society. Take one example is discussing how to improve student parents' participation on student learning improvement or tackling new educational policies imposed at the school such as implementing self evaluation for school improvement. So, professional learning communities should be focused on pupil achievement and professional learnings issues (Bolam, et al., 2005) might be widened.

After creating the program with clear directions, principals needs to provide sufficient support to the program to operate. Research shows that time allocation is essential (Andriani, Wiwik, and Pujaningsih, 2013). This finding is in line with previous findings that professional learning communities requires time for professionals to have discussion on a regular basis (Bolam et al., 2005; Fulton & Britton; 2011). In addition, the most appropriate time for homeroomteachers at public elementary schools in Indonesia to meet for collaborative learning activities is after teaching hours which is 12 am; and the meeting is expected to be held once a week in an hour for each meeting (Andriani, Wiwik, and Pujaningsih, 2013).

Besides, providing a room set in a particular arrangement that is conducive to stimulate collective learnings among homeroom teachers is also found to be important. For example,



circle design is likely more conducive to encourage teachers to have more interactive discussion. Furthermore, seat arrangement in teacher rooms should also be a concern. When teachers' seats are arranged in a certain design in which teachers with same responsibilities- teaching same subjects or same grade level- sit near one to another, they are in a stimulating situation to have frequent and deep professional discussion (Andriani, Wiwik, & Pujaningsih, 2013). In line with this findings, Bolam, et al. (2005) found that opportunities for professional exchange appear to be further facilitated by physical proximity. In addition, interdependent teaching roles, for instance team teaching, joint lesson planning are also other conditions that build proximity among teachers and so to learn and work together is much easier to happen.

Furthermore, it is necessary that the program invites external educational experts, for example academicians from universities, experienced teachers from other schools, educational supervisors, or staff from District Office. The external experts will be helpful for communities to enhance their skills and knowledge that are not well comprehended by teachers at schools (Andriani, Wiwik, and Pujaningsih, 2013). As Bolam, et al., (2005) said that communities should be open to learning sources and ideas from outside. Accordingly, developing networking and partnerships with a wide range institutions and communities that have concern on education is beneficial.

In order to effectively develop teachers' capabilities, it is a demand that principals apply shared leadership. Findings show that this kind of leadership significantly influence the nature of school cultures (Bolam, et al., 2005) and trust climate that support collaborative learnings (Fulton & Briton, 2011). Employing such leadership, principals involve teachers in decision making (Ardottir, 2005) and provide opportunities for teachers to take a wide range of leadership roles (Bolam, et al., 2013).

## **Conclusion**

Professional learning community can enhance teachers' professional practices and efficacy and finally better students' learning and achievement. When a school is learning communities, there is close relationship among school members (the principal, teachers, students, supporting staff) based on shared values, and shared responsibility of the quality of student learnings. To successfully begin, principals should develop at least two conditions. The first one is a structure that allows time for teachers to meet and talk on regular basis. Accordingly, teaching roles and responsibilities should be organized in a certain pattern that

builds interdependencies among teachers. Furthermore, close physical proximity should be intentionally created so that teachers frequently meet and talk each others and so they may naturally collaborate with one another. The second one is building a school culture based on trust and respect, with strong, supportive leaders that focus on openness and improvement.

## References

- Alberta Education. (2006). *Professional Learning Communities : An Exploration*. Canada : InPraxis Group Inc.
- Andrews, D. and Lewis, M. (2004). Building sustainable futures: emerging understanding of the significant contribution of the professional learning community. *Improving Schools*, 7 (129), hal. 128-149. DOI: 10.1177/1365480204047345
- Ardottir, Anna K. S. 2005. Studying and Enhancing Professional Learning Community for School Effectiveness in Iceland. *Revista Electronica Lberoamericana sobre Calidad, Eficacia y Cambio en Educacion*, 3 (1), hal. 178-193.
- Bolam, R. (2008). Professional Learning Communities and Teacher's Professional Development. Dalam D. Johnson, R. Maclean. *Teaching, Professionalization, Development, and Leadership*. Springer Science+Business Media.
- Bollam, R., et al. (2005). Creating and Sustaining Effective Professional Learning. *Research Report*. University of Bristol, Bath, and London, Institute of Education: UK.
- Benson, (2011). *Dessertation. Teacher Collaboration in Context: Professional Learning Communities in an Era of Standardization and Accountability*. USA: Arizona State University.
- Fulton, K. & Britton, T. (2011). *STEM's Teachers in Professional Learning Communities: From Good Teachers to Great Teachers*. USA: National Commision on Teaching and America's Future..
- Kilpatric, et al, without year. *Defining Learning Communities*. University of Tasmania, Australia.
- Lunenberg, F. C. 2010. Creating A Professional Learning Community. *National Forum of Educational Administration and Supervision Journal*, 27, (4), hal. 1-8.
- Morrissey, (2000). *Professional Learning Communities: An Ongoing Exploration*. Texas.
- NCTE, (2010). *Teacher Learning Communities. A Policy Research Brief*. The National Council of Teachers of English.
- Oxley, D. 2001. Organizing Schools into Small Learning Communities. *NASSP Bulletin* 85 625, May DOI: 10.1177/019263650108562502

Sergiovanni, Thomas G. (2006). The *Principals'hip. A Reflective Practice Perspective. Fifth Edition*. Boston: Pearson.

Stoll, L., Bolam, R., McMahon, A., Thomas, Sally., Wallace, M., Greenwood, Angela., Hawkey, Kate (2006) *Professional Learning Communities: source materials for school leaders and other leaders of professional learning . Exploring the idea of professional learning communities*. UK:National College for School Leadership

The Department of Education and Training, (2005). *Professional Learning in Effective Schools The Seven Principles of Highly Effective Professional Learning*.Victoria: McLaren Press.

Thomson, S. C., Gregg, L. , Nisca, J. M. (2004). Professional Learning Communities, Leadership, and Student Learning. *Research in Middle Education Level (RMEL)*, 28, (1), hal 1-15.